Introduction: The De Soto Expedition, a Cultural Crossroads

by Paul E. Hoffman

Spanish Context and the Significance of De Soto's Expedition

We will probably never know when European seamen first laid eyes on peninsular Florida and lived to tell about it. The standard narrative accounts of early voyages, such as those of Peter Martyr, Gonzalo Fernández Oviedo y Valdés, and Bartholomé de Las Casas, and the manuscript correspondence, lawsuits, *residencias,* notarial records, and treasury records have failed, so far, to yield any clear evidence prior to the 1510s. Tantalizing clues exist: the Cantino Map, said to date to 1503; the discovery of Bermuda in 1505; the circumnavigation of Cuba in 1508; and in Juan Ponce de León's apparent knowledge of land west of the Bahamas when he asked for permission to seek "Bimini" in 1512. From the teens come more specific but still vague references to slaving voyages and the indirect evidence provided by the hostile reception that Ponce received.[1]

After Ponce de León's voyage of 1513, there was no doubt that land existed north of Cuba and west of the Bahamas. The extent of that land in either direction was, however, less clear and remained vague until the 1520s, because Spanish exploration was still driven, even in the 1510s, by various forms of the Columbian-Vespuccian effort to fit the "new world" (Vespucci) or "another world" (Columbus) into Ptolemaic concepts of world geography. In those concepts, the new discoveries were either islands off of Asia or

[1]The slaving voyages of Pedro de Salazar and Diego de Miruelo are discussed in Paul E. Hoffman, "A New Voyage of North American Discovery: The Voyage of Pedro de Salazar to the Island of Giants," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 58 (1980): 415–26.

various peninsulas jutting out from it.[2] The job of explorers, according to this conceptualization of the world, was to go around these islands and peninsulas to the southeast and south, or, if starting from the southern side of the Isthmus of Panama, to sail west across the "great gulf" thought to separate the "new world" peninsula (or island) from Asia proper. Ferdinand Magellan's voyage (1519–23), the explorations of Vasco Núñez de Balboa (1517–19) westward in the Gulf of Panama, and Gil Gonzalez Dávila's exploration up the west coast of Central America (1520–23) fit this pattern, as do the "minor voyages" along the northeastern coast of South America in the years 1499–1519.[3]

A better understanding of the extent of North America developed rapidly after 1517. In that year, Francisco Hernández de Córdoba was sent to Yucatan, first explored by Vicente Yáñez Pinzón and Juan Díaz de Solís (1508–9). Hernández de Córdoba's findings, soon amplified by Juan de Grijalva's voyage as far as Cabo Rojo (1518), set in motion not only Hernán Cortés's expedition of 1519, which resulted in the conquest of central Mexico two years later, but also the voyage of Alonso Alvarez de Pineda, sent in 1519 by Francisco de Garay, governor of Jamaica. Alvarez de Pineda was to seek the strait that one variant on the Ptolemaic theory suggested might lie north of the "new world," now conceived as a very large island off the coast of Asia. Alvarez de Pineda did not find any opening along the northern and eastern shores of the Gulf of Mexico, nor did he divine that the "River of Flowers" that he had passed drained the interior of a continent.[4] He did, however, visit Cortés's outpost at Vera Cruz and left a small Spanish force on the Pánuco River.

If, after Alvarez de Pineda's exploration, it was clear that a land mass enclosed the Gulf of Mexico, the questions then became how far to the north that land ran and if there was open water between it and the land areas associated with the cod fisheries in the far north. Answers to these questions

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[2]John H. Parry, *The Discovery of South America* (New York: Taplinger Publishing, 1979), 78–79.

[3]In addition to Parry, see Louis-André Vigneras, *The Discovery of South America and the Andalucian Voyages* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976).

[4]Alvarez de Pineda's map has been published in William P. Cumming, R. A. Skelton, and David B. Quinn, *The Discovery of North America* (New York: American Heritage Press, 1972), 68–69; his record of his voyage is incorporated into Alonso de Chaves, *Alonso de Chaves y el libro de su "Espejo de Navegantes,"* ed. by Pablo Castañeda, M. Cuesta, and P. Hernández (Madrid: privately printed, 1977), 120–22. The identification of the Río de Flores as the Mississippi is mine.

were obtained in 1521–25. In 1521, slavers sailing on behalf of two companies, each involving judges of the Audiencia of Santo Domingo, made landfall at the South Santee River, in modern South Carolina. Subsequently, the Licenciado Lucas Vázquez de Ayllón, one of the judges, obtained a royal contract for the exploration and then settlement of this new discovery, which he claimed was at 35°, 36°, and 37°N latitude (it was actually at 33°20′), the same "parallel" as Andalucia in Spain. His pilot, Pedro de Quejo, explored the coast from near Delaware Bay to Saint Simon's Sound (1525) but found no evidence of a strait.[5] Meanwhile, from the north and in 1523, Esteban Gómez had sailed south to about the area of New York harbor, again finding no strait.[6] Thus, by the end of 1525, the Spaniards knew that North America stood between Europe and Asia. In addition, thanks to the Magellan-El Cano voyage (1519–22), they knew that the Pacific Ocean was very wide. The Americas, or, as the Spaniards called them, the Indies, truly were a "new world."

Spanish attempts to conquer and colonize the newly revealed North American land mass began in 1521, when Francisco de Garay received a royal contract to conquer "Amichel," and Ponce de León made a final, fatal attempt to gain control over the Indians of south Florida. Garay's Amichel was a province whose southern border was at or near the Pánuco River in Mexico. To the east and north, "Amichel" ended wherever Juan Ponce de León's "Florida" began, an undetermined point on the northern Gulf Coast. There is evidence that Garay intended all along to force his way into Mexico and that he had Alvarez de Pineda leave men on the Pánuco River in 1519 in preparation for that attempt. In the end, he failed because Cortés had control of the rich central provinces of New Spain, as the Spanish called Mexico, and so was able to suborn most of Garay's men into joining him. Garay died at Mexico City in 1524, vainly trying to obtain recognition of his claim over the Pánuco drainage.[7] Ponce de León died at San Juan, Puerto Rico, in 1522 from wounds received when he and his men had tried to land among the Caloosahatchee Indians in April 1521.[8]

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[5]Paul E. Hoffman, *A New Andalucia and a Way to the Orient: The American Southeast in the Sixteenth Century* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1990), 20–21, 35–36, 51–58.

[6]Samuel E. Morison, *The European Discovery of America*, 2 vols. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), 1:326–31.

[7]Robert S. Weddle, *Spanish Sea: The Gulf of Mexico in North American Discovery, 1500–1685* (College Station: Texas A&M Press, 1985), 95–108, 130–46.

[8]Morison, *European Discovery*, 2:506–12 (1513 voyage), 2:515–16 (1521 voyage).

Along the Atlantic Coast, the Spanish attempt at conquest and settlement began in 1526, when Ayllón landed a colony of six hundred persons at the Santee River-Winyah Bay area. His plan, apparently, was to have his native interpreters (captured in 1521) guide him to the Indian chiefdom of Duhae (also, Du-a-e), in the interior. However, the interpreters fled. Moreover, the coastal zone was found to be largely empty of inhabitants and lacking in foods familiar to the Spaniards. Scouting parties Ayllón sent to explore the coast to the south reported the existence of an area with an Indian population that grew maize. So Ayllón moved his colony to the area of the Guale Indians who lived around Sapelo and St. Catherine's sounds in modern Georgia. Established on or about September 29, 1526, as San Miguel de Gualdape, this new colony was abandoned in late October or early November, following Ayllón's death on October 18.[9]

The next Spanish intrusion into the Southeast was the result of accident rather than design. Pánfilo de Narváez obtained a grant in 1526 that made him heir to Ponce de León and Garay, thus allowing him to colonize anywhere from Amichel on the west to the Cape of Florida on the east. His intention was to move into Amichel, the gateway to Mexico. But bad luck, in the form of a storm as his fleet neared Havana, forced him to seek shelter on the middle west coast of Florida during Holy Week, 1528. He had evidently provisioned his ships only for the leg of the trip from Trinidad to Havana and so now found himself in a strange land on short rations.

Although not indisputable, the available evidence shows that he landed at Johns Pass, just north of the entrance to Tampa Bay. Alvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca, whose account is almost all that we know of this expedition's history, indicates that the pilots and officials of the expedition were uncertain of their geography or location. In the end, over Cabeza de Vaca's objection, they decided to send the ships northward and then south to Havana for supplies and to march the army north, in the belief that they would soon find a "deep bay" reaching ten leagues into the land. There they would wait for the ships, meanwhile living off the stored food of the inhabitants.

Following this design, Narváez marched northward within a few leagues of the coast until he crossed the Withlacoochee River. In all of that area, his men found little to eat and no Indians. Once across the Withlacoochee, he turned inland and used Indian guides to move northward to Apalachee. According to Cabeza de Vaca, the army met few Indians but did encounter their maize fields at intervals of seven or eight leagues (seventeen to twenty-

[9]Hoffman, *New Andalucia*, 66–80.

five miles, depending on which league he was using). Apalachee was also a disappointment, apparently because they were fooled into thinking that an outlying, rather small village was the entire province. Having rested there, the Spaniards decided to go west to Aute, said to have abundant food, and then to the sea, with the intention of making boats, or making contact with their own ships, so that they might escape to Amichel or Mexico. And that, in summary, is what they did, except that the boats they built were wrecked on the Texas coast. Only Cabeza de Vaca and two other men survived to reach Mexico in 1536.[10]

When Hernando de Soto returned from Peru to Spain to seek his own area of government in Ecuador or Guatemala, or permission to conquer some new area, the fate of the Narváez expedition was still not known, although its disappearance was. That fact fit with the gradually building reputation of the Gulf and Atlantic coasts of North America. Alvarez de Pineda had summed up his findings along the upper Gulf Coast by saying that "all the land is low and sterile."[11] Ponce de León had found the Cape of Florida area inhabited by brave, skilled warriors who beat the Spaniards in pitched battles, an almost unheard-of event. The majority of Ayllón's surviving colonists spread the word that the Atlantic Coast, too, was not suitable for colonization, even where there were Indians. Although fish and fowl were abundant, few sources of carbohydrates that were familiar or acceptable to the Spaniards seemed available.[12] Ayllón's propaganda about it being a "new Andalucia" was false. Only the rumored pearls and "terrestrial gems" of an inland province called "Xapira" might still be true. But no one really knew, because Ayllón's people had not reached into the interior, having lost their guides to that area at the Santee-Winyah Bay landing site (which was the one known to give access to Xapira, according to a report by a native captured in 1521). Cabeza de Vaca's return to the Spanish world allowed De Soto to fill in this picture with knowledge of the experiences of Narváez on the west coast of peninsular Florida.

Hernando de Soto was the inheritor not only of all the previous grants,

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[10]Paul E. Hoffman, "Narváez and Cabeza de Vaca in Florida," in Charles Hudson and Carmen McClendon, eds., *The Forgotten Centuries: Indians and Europeans in the American South, 1513–1704* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1993).

[11]Included in the text of Francisco de Garay's contract for the conquest of Amichel, June 4, 1521, in Martín Fernández de Navarrete, ed., *Colección de los viages y descubrimientos que hicieron por mar los Españoles desde fines del siglo XV*, 5 vols. (Madrid, 1825–1837), 3:160.

[12]Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo, *Historia general y natural de las Indias*, 4 vols. (Madrid: Real Academia de la Historia, 1851–55), 3:631–33.

now consolidated into a single province of "La Florida," but also of his predecessors' painfully gained knowledge about the coast and interior.[13] Judging by his actions, he made as much use of this information as he could, beginning with the selection of a landing point and in deciding where to move next. The accuracy of this information was probably not very good, however, a fact that the modern reader should bear in mind.

Probably the first fruit that De Soto gathered from the work of his predecessors was that neither the Atlantic Coast nor the Gulf Coast was preferable. Neither offered deep, protected ports that also gave immediate access to large native populations. Ayllón's San Miguel, a possible exception to this rule, was of unknown location; not even the pilot major of the House of Trade in Seville recorded it in his collection of sailing directions and coastal descriptions.[14] Because neither coast offered any particular advantage, De Soto seems to have opted for the Gulf Coast of peninsular Florida because it was close to Cuba and easy to reach on both legs of a trip back and forth. An Atlantic Coast port, while easy to reach from the Antilles, would have required a return via a long detour east of the Bahamas, through the Mona Passage, or even farther east into the Atlantic Ocean. Then there was the long and sometimes difficult journey around western Cuba and back into the Gulf to Havana. A voyage using the counter-current along the coast of Florida and then across the Gulf Stream to Havana was less difficult and lengthy, but it was more dangerous because it required sailing close to the shore in relatively shallow water.

Having decided his general line of approach to La Florida, De Soto next made use of Cabeza de Vaca's information about the bay that Narváez had glimpsed and that his ships had found on their voyage south. According to Cabeza de Vaca, this bay, modern Tampa Bay, was "so uninhabited and so poor [a land] as had ever been found in those parts."[15] Accordingly, De Soto sent Juan de Añasco to seek a better harbor, which he found seventy-five to eighty leagues north of Havana, rather short of the hundred leagues that was the standard estimate of the distance to Bahía Honda, that is, Tampa Bay.[16]

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[13]De Soto's contract is published herein, vol. 1.

[14]Chaves, *Alonso de Chaves*, 124–25.

[15]Alvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca, *La relación de los naufragios de Alvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca*, ed. Martín A. Favata and José B. Fernández (Potomac, Md.: Scripta Humanistica, 1986), 18, my translation.

[16]Chaves, *Alonso de Chaves*, 121, No. 9. De Soto and the treasury officials described this port as "inhabited and very secure," thus implicitly contrasting it to Narváez's Bahía Honda. Quoted in John R. Swanton, *Final Report of the United States De Soto Expedition Commission*,

Whether that newly discovered port is where De Soto actually landed is another, much-debated question. The point is that De Soto sought to avoid the sterile bay that Narváez had found.

In the same way, De Soto's path north in the interior (rather than close to the coast) of peninsular Florida seems to have been based on the experience of Narváez. De Soto had better scouting and an efficient policy of moving from the central town of each chiefdom to that of the next, a technique probably learned in Central America. This took him to Apalachee, where he found the central town. Then he subjected the entire province to foraging activities, unlike Narváez, who had been kept at a minor village with little food.

De Soto's pace may also have been determined, at least initially, by the experience of Narváez. Elvas says that De Soto marched five or six leagues a day in populated areas, and as rapidly as his men and swine would allow in unpopulated ones to avoid hunger from lack of maize.[17] Swanton presents evidence that De Soto moved at about twelve miles per day during the march to the Withlacoochee River.[18] These figures are estimated averages. They are very close to the minimum distance (seven leagues) that Cabeza de Vaca mentions as that between Indian maize fields. The figures suggest that De Soto intended to avoid Narváez's experience of hunger. Narváez attributed the difficulty in getting food to the fact that his men did not make a day's march between sources of maize. Jeffrey Mitchem has suggested that De Soto's inclusion of pigs in his expedition was another effort to avoid Narváez's hunger.[19]

Apalachee's nature and general location relative to the coast were the last useful information De Soto could have derived from Narváez's experience. Of the knowledge that his predecessors had gathered about La Florida, only Ayllón's province of pearls and "terrestrial gems" remained as a guide to

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1938, reprint with introduction by Jeffrey Brain (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1985), 101.

[17]"The Account by a Gentleman from Elvas," *True Relation of the Hardships Suffered by Governor Hernando de Soto & Certain Portuquese Gentlemen During the Discovery of the Province of Florida, Now newly set forth by a Gentlemen of Elvas*, trans. and ed. James Alexander Robertson, herein, vol. 1. Cited hereafter as Elvas, *Relation*.

[18]Swanton, *Final Report*, 302. See also his p. 105.

[19]Jeffrey M. Mitchem, "Initial Spanish-Indian Contact in West Peninsular Florida: The Archaeological Evidence," in *Columbian Consequences*, vol. 2: *Archaeological and Historical Perspectives on the Spanish Borderlands East*, ed. David Hurst Thomas (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1990), 51.

future action. De Soto followed up on it because an Indian boy, Pedro, provided him with a description of Cofitachequi that matched part of the Ayllón material.

Once at Cofitachequi, De Soto's men found knives and beads that they recognized could have come from Ayllón's colony. Mistakenly believing that he had landed at only one place, they assumed that the river of Cofitachequi (probably the Wateree, which feeds into the Santee) was the river where Ayllón had died.[20] They called this river the Santa Elena and assumed that it came out at the point of the same name, a landmark that could be found because it was at 32°N according to Alonso de Chaves. They thus established, in their own minds, a way to approach the rich agricultural possibilities of Cofitachequi by using the sea and this river. A subsequent search in the mountains farther north and west failed to turn up any sign of the "terrestrial gems" (actually quartz and other types of crystal) or any minerals aside from some copper that the Native Americans had obtained by trade from mines located farther north than De Soto penetrated. In short, Ayllón's report of pearls in the interior was accurate, but the rest of his tale of "Xapira" seemed not to be.

De Soto was not interested in freshwater pearls and agricultural lands. Dreaming of new gold mines such as he and others had found in the mountains of Central America, he turned his army westward and continued the search. His next major stopping place was Coosa. It, like Cofitachequi, came to be remembered as a place of abundant food and good prospects for European agriculture. In fact, after the events of the next two years, Coosa took on the qualities of a Garden of Eden in the telling and retelling of the adventures of the army.

In sum, De Soto's expedition not only consolidated all prior grants into one, but it also used and checked the geographic knowledge deriving from those expeditions. It brought a closure to the early Spanish explorations and attempts at settlement in La Florida. At the same time, its experiences at Cofitachequi, and even more at Coosa, served to create a new piece of knowledge, perhaps better understood as a folkloric legend, about the Southeast: that these interior places would be good for Spanish settlement and might, because of dense Indian populations, allow the establishment of *encomiendas,* whose members would cultivate the soil for their new lords.

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[20]Luys Hernández de Biedma, "Relations of the Island of Florida," herein, vol. 1; Rodrigo Rangel, "Account of the Northern Conquest and Discovery of Hernando de Soto," herein, vol. 1; Elvas *Relation,* herein, vol. 1.

This new belief in the idyllic Coosa is well reflected in the words that Francisco Cervantes de Salazar put into the mouth of Zuazo in the following dialogue from his *Life in the Imperial and Loyal City of Mexico in New Spain* (1554): "ZUAZO: . . . Florida, lying distant only an easy and very short voyage by sea, and by land neither a long nor a difficult journey, should be conquered. . . . ALFARO: What advantage and profit would your province derive from this action? ZUAZO: Very much indeed, for whatever is produced by the other Spain in the Old World, from which merchandise is imported into ours with so much delay and difficulty, all this would be supplied by Florida, which produces much more abundantly and is contiguous to us."[21]

Although later in date and of uncertain origins, Garcilaso de la Vega's report of Viceroy Mendoza's reaction to the De Soto story is along the same lines. Garcilaso says that although Mendoza was saddened by the loss of so many men and the hardships of the others, he was "very happy to hear of the spaciousness of that kingdom, the opportunity that it holds for raising all kinds of livestock, and the fertility of the land in corn, grains, fruits, and vegetables."[22]

This vision of Coosa's abundance and potential were among the main motives for the colonizing expedition of Tristán de Luna y Arellano. Luna went from Mexico to Florida in 1559 to build a series of Spanish settlements that would link Achuse (Pensacola Bay) on the Gulf of Mexico, with the Point of Santa Elena (Tybee Island at the mouth of the Savannah River) on the Atlantic Ocean. Each was to be built in the center of an Indian chiefdom, whose residents would in time be brought to obey the Spaniards and be placed in encomiendas awarded to the more meritorious colonists.[23] The expedition failed to achieve any of these goals. Its last soldiers withdrew from the shore of Pensacola Bay in 1561.

If the Luna expedition was the most direct consequence of De Soto's *entrada* so far as the Spaniards were concerned, there were others of less consequence. Knowledge of the agricultural possibilities of the interior, of the relatively dense Native American populations there, and that there was a way to reach and cross the mountains and continue westward toward Mexico all seem to have played some role in Pedro Menéndez de Avilés's decision

[21]Francisco Cervantes de Salazar, *Life in the Imperial and Loyal City of Mexico in New Spain* (1554), trans. Mimia Lee Barrett Shepard (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1953), 79.

[22]Garcilaso de la Vega, *La Florida*, herein, vol. 2.

[23]Hoffman, *New Andalucia*, 144, 151.

to send Captain Juan Pardo into the interior in 1566 and 1567. Pardo left from the new Spanish post at Santa Elena town, established in the spring of 1566 on Parris Island, S.C.[24]

Another consequence was the confusion of Alvarez de Pineda's Bay of the Holy Spirit and De Soto-Moscoso's River of the Holy Spirit. The latter is the Mississippi, but the former appears to have been one of the bays on the Louisiana coast west of the "father of waters." The similarity of the names led to their conflation on later maps, with the river shown as emptying into the bay, which is placed farther west than the actual location of the Mississippi's delta. This mistaken placement had little effect on the Spaniards, who apparently never tried to find the River of the Holy Spirit until the 1680s. Later, it may have helped to convince the Sieur de la Salle and his French patrons that his incorrect latitude for the river's delta was somehow right, since it placed the outlet on the western side of the Gulf of Mexico, in the general vicinity of the Bay and River of the Holy Spirit.[25]

The Native American Context and Significance

The De Soto expedition has long been recognized as vital to understanding the history of Native American cultures in the areas he visited. The accounts of the expedition provide a sort of snapshot of populations, political systems, and, seemingly, cultural ways that correspond to late phases of the Mississippian cultural horizon in the Southeast. As Ann Ramenofsky has recently noted, this information in the chronicles was a critical link in Cyrus Thomas's resolution of the so-called Mound Builder debate, and in most of the "direct historical" study of southeastern Indians since.[26] Much recent archaeological scholarship has tested data found in these accounts, while at the same time providing information and details that the Spaniards overlooked or thought unworthy of mention in their accounts. Ongoing controversies about "the route" have led to efforts to better understand selected

[24]Charles Hudson, *The Juan Pardo Expeditions: Exploration of the Carolinas and Tennessee, 1566–1568* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1990), provides details and transcriptions and translations of documents relating to these expeditions.

[25]Peter H. Wood, "La Salle: Discovery of a Lost Explorer," *American Historical Review* 89 (1984): 294–323. La Salle did not, however, mistake the River and Bay of the Holy Spirit as the outlets of the Mississippi, which he had named the Colbert.

[26]Ann F. Ramenofsky, "Loss of Innocence: Explanations of Differential Persistence in the Sixteenth-Century Southeast," in *Columbian Consequences*, vol. 2, 33–35.

sites and to synthesize archaeological findings into larger pictures of polities and their cultures. Jeffrey Brain summarized this research (to 1984) in his introduction to the reprint of the 1939 United States De Soto Expedition Commission report.[27] Brain and Charles Ewen herein provide a bibliography that brings Brain's earlier bibliography up to date. In general, it appears that we now have a better understanding of the geographic extent of, social stratification of, and general subsistence and cultural ways of the peoples De Soto encountered in his peregrination through their maize fields. Much remains to be learned, especially about the supposed effects of De Soto's passing on Native American cultures.

The De Soto expedition's effects on the native peoples of the American Southeast have been much debated, especially because those effects may be an explanation for the apparent demographic, cultural, and political collapse of the Mississippian cultures, and the subsequent cultural and political reorganization that occurred between De Soto's time and the European penetration of the region that began in the late seventeenth century. In the most common explanation of the changes, De Soto's men are said to have spread disease that destroyed the demographic basis of the societies he visited, causing the disintegration of the culture.[28]

The demographic consequences of European, and not just De Soto's, contact with the southeastern Indians are the subject of recent works by G. R. Milner, Henry F. Dobyns, Marvin Smith, and Ann Ramenofsky.[29]

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[27]Swanton, *Final Report.*

[28]Rochelle A. Marrinan, John F. Scarry, and Rhonda L. Majors, "Prelude to De Soto: The Expedition of Pánfilo de Narváez," in *Columbian Consequences,* vol. 2, 78, suggest that the Spaniards confronted the Indians with a reality that could not be contained in their worldview and that somehow caused cultural collapse. The basis for this suggestion is the work of Mary W. Helms, *Ulysses' Sail: An Ethnographic Odyssey of Power, Knowledge, and Geographical Distance* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988). For a different view, see Janet E. Levy, J. Alan May, and David G. Moore, "From Ysa to Joara: Cultural Diversity in the Catawba Valley from the Fourteenth to the Sixteenth Century," in *Columbian Consequences,* vol. 2, 164. The similar case of the collapse of the Classic Maya culture in southern Yucatan has been ignored by students of the southeastern Indians. Single-cause explanations such as disease, failure of priests to predict some celestial event, or the invasion of corn fields (*milpas*) by grasses have been suggested at one time or another for the Maya case. Recent work suggests the compounding effects of an invasion from Central Mexico.

[29]G. R. Milner, "Epidemic Disease in the Post-Contact Southeast: A Reappraisal," *Mid-continental Journal of Archaeology* 5 (1980): 3–17; Henry F. Dobyns, *Their Number Became Thinned: Native American Population Dynamics in Eastern North America* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1983); Marvin T. Smith, *Archaeology of Aboriginal Culture Change in the Interior Southeast: Depopulation during the Early Historic Period* (Gainesville: University

Smith, especially, has better archaeological evidence (especially of mass burials) than was available to Dobyns. But all of these works rely heavily on analogy from modern epidemiological studies. They also sometimes accept unstated assumptions about the role of demographic change as a factor in cultural change. They extrapolate data from the rather vague numerical reports in the accounts of the De Soto and some other early expeditions and on the report of a disease that had caused the depopulation of a town near Cofitachequi the year before De Soto arrived.[30] They rely on the scanty evidence of what Coosa was like at the time of the De Soto and Luna expeditions and on the dating of artifacts.[31]

A nonspecialist in these matters often gets the impression that Old World diseases, arising *solely* from the De Soto expedition's passage, are a sort of "deus ex machina" that substitutes for what must in reality have been complex cause-and-effect relationships in a sequence of events. A step in the direction of a complex explanation of the changes and of demography's role in them is Ramenofsky's recent proposal for a Darwinian (environmental) model for responses to disease.[32] Clearly, some Old World diseases did reach epidemic levels among the southeastern Indians during the sixteenth century, but whether that was before or after or because of De Soto remains to be tested, as do their full effects on the political and social structures that De Soto's men recorded.

The very substantial problems presented by limited documentary data can be illustrated by the evidence from Coosa. De Soto's men described Coosa as flourishing; Luna's men found small villages and relatively little food eighteen years later. However, archaeologists and historians generally have not subjected these statements to skeptical examination as a possible example of "explorer's rhetoric" (De Soto's men) versus "settler's rhetoric"

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of Florida Press, 1987); Ann F. Ramenofsky, *Vectors of Death: The Archaeology of European Contact* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1987); Ramenofsky, "Loss of Innocence," 31–48.

[30]Elvas, *Relation*, Biedma, "Relation," and Rangel, "Account of the Northern Conquest," herein, vol. 1; Garcilaso, *La Florida*, herein, vol. 2.

[31]Many strides have recently been made in isotope and trace-element analysis and in dating bead types, with the result that we have better dates, but still ones that are plus or minus a number, often a large number of years. Spanish artifacts, aside from beads, are nearly impossible to date to anything less than a century; the most datable beads, Nueva Cadiz, can be dated only as pre-1550 in manufacture. Native American ceramics are typically dated by the half-century or longer interval, and sometimes even by reference to their association with European objects!

[32]Ramenofsky, "Loss of Innocence," 37–44.

(Luna's men).[33] Nor have the folkloric qualities of the De Soto Coosa story been fully evaluated. Nor has much work been done on the narrative strategies of the De Soto chroniclers that might have led them to embellish Coosa's reality. Yet without such care to discover the biases behind the data, the data can give false impressions, leading to false conclusions. Put another way, historical "facts," like archaeological artifacts, have "proveniences" that give them meaning. They cannot be, as artifacts cannot be, simply "dug up."

In short, the proposition that De Soto's expedition, and its presumed diseases, largely if not completely accounts for the transformation of southeastern Indian societies remains a thesis or theory, whose verification awaits the development of archaeological and possibly ethnographic evidence that is better than any currently available for the 1540–1700 period.

The consequences for Native American societies of De Soto's activities that can be documented are limited to the diffusion of European manufactures, such as cloth, clothing, iron objects, and glass beads (all available from other contacts with Europeans), the deaths of large numbers (but probably not the thousands claimed) of Indians in battles with De Soto, and limited population movements caused by his forcing Indian burden bearers to leave their chiefdoms and enter neighboring, usually hostile, ones before he released them. An example of the latter is the Indian who explained to Alonso Velas, one of Pardo's soldiers, that he did not wish to accompany him any farther than Satapo because he had five brothers who had been captured by the Coosa while in the company of De Soto.[34] These were not insignificant consequences, but they may have been less important in the long run than other factors particular to the native cultures in question.

Recent Critiques of the Chronicles

Literary studies of those De Soto chronicles published in these volumes have been limited in number, but they do provide important perspectives on the interrelatedness of the texts and on the factual veracity of the chronicles,

[33]See Wayne Franklyn, *Discoverers, Explorers, and Settlers: The Diligent Writers of Early America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 70–71, 122–24. The folkloric quality of the Coosa story was suggested by the comments of George E. Lankford in "Legends of the Adelantado," a paper he presented to the 2nd Arkansas De Soto Conference, Fayetteville, March 28, 1990. Copy in collection of the author.

[34]Testimony in the "Long Bandera Relation," trans. Paul E. Hoffman, in Hudson, *Pardo Expeditions*, 272.

and thus on their utility for the details of Native American culture. Patricia Galloway, picking up threads from the work of the late Daymond Turner, has probed the possible links between the Rangel/Oviedo text and that of the Gentleman of Elvas, going so far as to suggest that Oviedo's printer probably had the manuscript additions to Oviedo's *Historia general*, in which the Rangel material was found, at the time that the printer moved to Portugal, which was not long before the Elvas account appeared in print.[35] That is to say, Elvas's account may be based upon the Rangel/Oviedo original, with additions by a Portuguese survivor of the expedition or someone else who was familiar with its legends.[36] Galloway also suspects that Elvas was the basic source for Garcilaso de la Vega's account.[37]

Garcilaso de la Vega's *The Florida of the Inca* has long been recognized as the most literary, and possibly the least reliable, of the four main accounts of the expedition.[38] Recently, David Henige has suggested that Garcilaso's literary purposes and the literary conventions of his time need to be taken into account, especially when using his descriptions of Indian society.[39] Both Henige and Galloway have called for modern critical, original-language editions of the sources, especially Oviedo.

Luís Hernández de Biedma's account (herein newly retranslated by John Worth), the only one to come down to us in a contemporary manuscript, has not been subjected to the same scrutiny as the Rangel/Oviedo, Elvas, and

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[35]Patricia Galloway, "Sources for the Hernando de Soto Expedition: Intertextuality and the Elusiveness of Truth," 12–13, 16. Paper presented to the Society of Spanish and Portuguese Historical Studies, New Orleans, April 1990. Collection of the author. This "intertextuality" of Rangel/Oviedo and Elvas was noticed as early as 1901 by Woodbury Lowery, *The Spanish Settlements Within the Present Limits of the United States* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1901), 1:459, where, in commenting on the Rangel text he says "the account up to the burning of Chicaça appears to be independent of, while it substantially agrees with, those of the other writers. Beyond that, it follows very closely the Elvas narrative. . . . Many of the names correspond with those of the Elvas narrative."

[36]Lankford, "Legends of the Adelantado," chart 2, p. 7, shows that of the twenty-one legends found in the part of the expedition's story that the Elvas and Rangel/Oviedo texts have in common, eleven are about the same incidents. The other ten would have been contributed by some other source.

[37]Personal communication.

[38]Dennis Fernandez, "La Florida del Inca Garcilaso de la Vega." Ph.D. Dissertation. Florida State University. 1970.

[39]David Henige, "The Content, Context, and Credibility of *La Florida del Ynca*," *The Americas* 43 (1986): 1–23.

Garcilaso accounts. Swanton noted its brevity (and thus lack of utility for "route" studies) and that "it supported the Portuguese chronicler [Elvas] rather than the Inca," but the implications of this observation have not been explored.[40]

The Cañete Fragment, here published for the first time together with Eugene Lyon's commentary, also awaits comparative study with the other texts. Its concern with flora and fauna suggests that the complete account, if it can ever be found, will provide new information about De Soto and his men's interest in the resources of the Southeast, unless, that is, it is shown that Cañete compiled his materials from Martyr and Oviedo.

Less controversial than the Henige-Galloway critiques of the nature and uses of the four sources is George Lankford's recent examination of the accounts from the perspective of a folklorist. Lankford has suggested that the members of the De Soto expedition "emerged from their cocoon in La Florida with a common set of [folkloric] legends about most of the important events they had lived through. . . ."[41] He finds eighty-two legends in Garcilaso, many of which also appear in the other written accounts. Stripped of these legends, Garcilaso's account is a "bare-bones story not significantly different from Elvas and Rangel in tone, although the details may vary."[42] He concludes that Garcilaso probably used Elvas, the written sources he claimed to have used, and oral testimony in the form of folkloric legends gathered from Gonzalo Silvestre. All were woven into a text fitting certain literary cannons of his time. The result has been an enjoyable tale read ever since and used by most popular writers as the basis for their retellings of the De Soto story.

The thrust of this recent critical scholarship of the accounts as interrelated rather than independent accounts and as literary documents is to confirm that a sequential itinerary can be constructed from the Biedma and Rangel accounts, supplemented by the derivative Elvas and Garcilaso accounts. Swanton's "Parallel Itinerary of the Expedition," reprinted here, is such a construction.

A measured itinerary, on the other hand, can be only partially reconstructed because Elvas provides most of the league distances, estimated in

[40]Swanton, *Final Report*, 9. Ida Altman is preparing a deconstructionist analysis of Biedma's text [personal communication, Patricia Galloway to author, October 3, 1990].

[41]Lankford, "Legends of the Adelantado," 2.

[42]Ibid., 14

units of ten, and because the length of his league and those used by the other sources are uncertain.[43] Arguments about how far the army marched in a day, the other line of approach to a measured itinerary, seem problematical because they rest heavily on Garcilaso (for the day count) and on assumptions and partial data about actual distances made good.[44] This approach is useful to the extent that it points to particular archaeological sites that fit the accounts and date to the correct period, but those who use it are in constant danger of employing a circular argument from the sites to the estimated day's travel.

In sum, recent literary studies of the De Soto chronicles have raised new doubts about their use in reconstructions of "the route" while helping to sort out fact and possible fiction in studies of the Native American cultures that De Soto met.

The De Soto Chronicles Project

Most present-day students of the expedition would not agree with Lowery that "it is a matter of comparatively small importance to trace the path of these Spanish adventurers with the precision of a modern railway. . . ."[45] It thus seems especially important that an edition of the best-available translations of all four accounts, and selected ancillary materials, be published. With all four narratives together, the curious student can better compare them to reach his/her own conclusions about their interrelatedness, literary and folkloric qualities, and veracity. Such an edition provides a basis from which to make a fresh start and to eliminate some of the old, erroneous answers still bandied about.

In addition to the four main chronicles, these volumes include selected materials from the United States De Soto Expedition Commission's *Final Report* of 1939 and the documents that Buckingham Smith published in 1866. To round out the presentation, Rocío Sánchez Rubio's recent biographical sketch of De Soto has been translated from the Spanish to provide

[43]For the best modern scholarship on this controversy see Roland Chardon, "The Elusive Spanish League: A Problem of Measurement in Sixteenth-Century New Spain," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 60 (1980): 294–302, and Charles Hudson and Marvin Smith, "Reply to Eubanks," *The Florida Anthropologist* 43 (1990): 36–42.

[44]Keith J. Little and Caleb Curren are the leading critics of the estimated day's travel approach. See "Conquest Archaeology of Alabama," *Columbian Consequences*, vol. 2, 170–71.

[45]Lowery, *Spanish Settlements*, 1:464.

some insight into how De Soto is viewed by a modern Spanish historian. This author's somewhat longer biography of De Soto to 1539 provides a different perspective on his life and character.

Finally, an observation about the arguments that have grown up, again, around "the route." An excitable and injudicious man himself, Hernando de Soto might be amused to see how much heat and controversy his legacy has produced.